

Subject: comments on Critical Habitat Map for Orca Whales

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To: <orcahabitat.nwr@noaa.gov>

Greetings,

I'm writing in response to your Critical Habitat Map. I've review the document on your website in addition to materials I've received and would like to submit comments for your consideration.

I live in the San Juans and the Orcas are such a part of our lives here. On an economic level, the Orca is synonymous with our area. Our resident and transient pods are like family to us. I can't imagine that one day, I could tell my son that this is a picture of a whale that USED to swim these waters. Our country faces continual environmental changes and the wildlife have been impacted in so many ways. The Orca is no exception. We must truly embrace our responsibility to protect them and do so to the fullest of our ability. In addition - on a personal and cultural note my husband is a member of the Snohomish Tribe and his totem is an Orca - in Native cultures, the Orcas is such a powerful symbol. It would be a shame if a symbol was all that remained of this amazing creature. They are on such a fragile population balance and we, as "stewards" of this land, truly need to do whatever possible to protect those we have and do our best to make it possible for their population to bounce back.

My input/response to your Critical Habitat Map is as follows:

1. The current proposal excludes 50% of truly criticals habitat that Orcas use during the winter months. This habitat includes Washington, Oregon, and California, as well as the outer coast of Vancouver island and the Queen Charlottes - I would like to encourage NOAA Fisheries to coordinate with their Canadian counterpart, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, in developing a bi-lateral recovery strategy for Southern Resident Orca Whales in our shared waters. It is my belief that NOAA should designate all Puget Sound waters, including all waters of less than 20 feet, and the outer coast of WA, OR, and CA, as critical habitat for the recovery of Southern Resident Orca.
2. NEARSHORE EXCLUSION: The current proposal does not address the equally critical nearshore environment. Many of Puget Sound's problems originate from pollution and habitat destruction on and near the shore. I strongly encourage that the nearshore areas of Puget Sound be protected as they comprise an important habitat for the main food supply in orcas' diet - salmon! Unfortunately, many sites along the nearshore are also contain contaminated sediments, and these sites need to be cleaned up to protect Orca, who currently carry high loads of toxic contaminants in their fatty tissue. Other concerns about the exclusion of the nearshore environment in this protection plan are the levels of noise from nearshore activities (including noise related to docks and military sonar testing), and the implications of climate change, and changes in sea level, making the shoreline an easier boundary to manage.
3. MILITARY EXCLUSION: I recognize the need for safeguarding our national security, but am equally concerned about the effects of mid and low frequency sonar used in training/testing activities by the Navy, toxic contaminants from military on shore and off shore operations, noise from construction and other activities, and vessel movement when Orca are present. The Navy has been a good partner in many aspects of Orca protection, and hope the Navy will work more proactively to protect the Southern Resident Orca Whales. There is amazing research and video documentation in this area of the effects of sonar on our whale population. I believe special consideration and quick environmental

review for military activities in Puget Sound be implemented and that all waters, including those near military facilities be included as critical habitat.

I appreciate your time and consideration as well as the opportunity comment on this proposal.

Cathy Faulkner

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